

Keywords:

Accountability, transparency, electricity, stakeholder

OVERVIEW

IIED Shaping Sustainable Markets Group

Project name:

Better Power – part of the Energy Change Lab initiative

Project leader:

Ben Garside

Time frame:

January–December 2015

Budget:

£40,000

Objective:

To find ways to improve the quality of electricity products and services in Tanzania by improving customer trust, and giving users a stronger voice and more active role in shaping their electrical supplies.

PROJECT SUMMARY

In Tanzania, electricity services are expanding, yet they are failing to deliver a high-quality service to end-users. The Energy Change Lab initiative has looked at how information channels and customer feedback mechanisms can be used to ensure that the electricity sector becomes more transparent and accountable to those it serves. A number of prototype solutions are being piloted, drawing on models from other countries and those developed by stakeholders in Tanzania.

CHANGE IN ACTION

There are, as yet, no civil society or consumer organisations in Tanzania working on the electricity sector from a transparency and accountability perspective. Yet, this is critical if the electricity sector of the future is to become more people-centred. There are many lessons to be learned from other parts of the energy sector, as well as areas such as health and education. The Energy Change Lab initiative is exploring approaches to designing and delivery energy services that put poor people at the heart of the process.

Pushing for better power in Tanzania

In Tanzania, the energy sector is expanding its electricity services but how can it be encouraged to deliver a reliable service and quality products to consumers?

Improved electricity services have the power to transform lives. Electricity for lighting, phone charging, radio and television creates opportunities for poor rural families to learn and communicate. Electricity adds value to local businesses in areas such as agricultural processing, fish chilling and carpentry. Ending energy poverty raises life chances.

But the electricity sector in Tanzania still fails to meet users' expectations or to serve their interests. According to the African Progress Panel, disruption to electricity supplies costs the region 2–4 per cent of its annual GDP. At the same time, Tanzania, like many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, is grappling with the influx of poor quality and counterfeit off-grid energy products such as solar lanterns and solar home systems. This undermines sustainable economic growth, jobs and investment.

Opening communication channels

It is clear that electricity services need to be improved. On the supply side, greater investment and increased power production is one route. The demand side, however, receives far less attention, and involves looking more closely at users' perceptions of the quality and fairness of existing products and services. The Energy Change Lab, an initiative co-founded by IIED and Hivos, wants to give Tanzanians the opportunity to think through energy issues in new ways. It is starting to bring together a diverse range

of stakeholders including electricity providers (on- and off-grid), sector experts, policymakers, regulators, development partners and civil society organisations. Through creating shared and safe dialogue spaces, it is hoped that key barriers can be overcome and that an inclusive and sustainable energy system that is more accountable to users will result.

To begin this process, the Energy Change Lab conducted a survey of 2,000 households together with the Tanzanian NGO Twaweza. Through assessing citizens' perceptions of electricity services, it became clear that grid-connected customers were unhappy with repeated service disruptions and 73 per cent said they lacked sufficient information on power cuts. The survey also found that energy customers have little understanding about off-grid products. They often choose cheaper, lower quality imitations of well-known brands or unknowingly buy counterfeit products. When these fail, they lose faith in solar products.

Building on the survey findings, the Energy Change Lab is developing customer information and feedback mechanisms that put end-user perspectives centre-stage. An accountability framework, which is not typically used in the electricity sector, has helped stakeholders to look more closely at where improvements could be made. It explores four key aspects of accountability (see Table 1).

KEY LESSONS LEARNT & INNOVATIONS

- A survey carried out by the Tanzanian NGO Twaweza highlighted the need to build consumer trust and confidence in Tanzanian electricity services and solar products. An accountability framework is being developed that allows stakeholders to look more closely at issues and put the concerns of ordinary people at the centre of energy debates.
- Service provision in the energy sector is often overly focused on technology and ignores the realities of people's lives. With a traditionally top-down service delivery, consumers themselves are also often accepting of the status quo and lack the capacity to find solutions to their own energy needs or to put collective upward pressure on the electricity provider. The Energy Change Lab is developing a problem-solving approach that encourages dialogue and creative solutions.
- A range of initiatives are being developed that will ensure that consumers have the power to shape electricity services. These include making data on issues such as power cuts publicly available, involving communities in planning decisions, and finding ways in which product standards can be developed.

PARTNERS' VIEW

Perceptions of quality of electricity products and services in Tanzania can be significantly improved by listening to users, providing them with better information, and addressing their concerns.

Sisty Basil, National Coordinator, Energy Change Lab – Tanzania

Hivos is an international organisation that seeks new solutions to persistent global issues.

This research was funded by DGIS and UK aid from the UK Government, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the Dutch Government or of the UK Government.



Table 1. Exploring an accountability framework in the electricity sector

Key aspect	Issues to be addressed	Practical example
Sharing useful information	Is information shared in a timely, relevant and accessible way with customers? Are key decisions properly explained?	Use the radio to promote local awareness of what a good product looks like Do not set expectations that cannot be delivered, for example of when the grid will arrive in remote areas
Responding to customers	Are customers' needs, views and feedback being addressed?	Engage with consumer organisations Actively encourage feedback from customers Consider mobile phone access and free texting services, for example for informing on power disruptions
Keeping to the rules	Are standards, targets or rules designed to improve energy services being enforced?	Encouraging government agencies to enforce quality standards, for example on imported solar products Provide effective warranties Ensure that products can easily be traced to particular importers
Enabling active citizenship	Are citizens or customers allowed to engage with policymakers and companies to secure or defend their interests? Is 'energy' perceived as an interesting and accessible topic?	Use local community groups to raise awareness Provide a reporting line for substandard products and ensure follow-up Encourage independent activity in consumer associations

Driving change forward

The Twaweza survey noted that 76 per cent of users thought that co-planning power cuts with communities would go a long way towards improving their quality of service and establishing users' trust in the service provider. Clearly, improving Tanzania's electricity services must involve confidence building. The framework outlined above provides a useful starting point to think through effective ways to do this.

An essential step in the change process is the enabling of active citizenship amongst consumers. Several problem-solving initiatives that empower electricity users have already been used in other countries. The Energy Change Lab is piloting an Energy Supply Monitoring Initiative (ESMI) in collaboration with the World Resources Institute (WRI) and Prayas Energy Group. ESMI was first developed in India and allows the quality of electricity supply to be recorded and reliably logged. The data can then be used to hold service providers accountable. Another possible solution to the problem of poor quality products comes from Kenya, where a voluntary certification scheme set up by the Kenya Renewable Energy Association (KEREAA) is applied to individuals and organisations in the solar product supply chain, rather than the products themselves. This encourages consumers and service providers to work together to improve quality controls.

Tanzania's Renewable Energy Association, TAREAA, is making people aware of the difference between good and bad quality solar products through radio broadcasts and at agricultural fairs. The Energy Change Lab also organised an 'Energy Safari', where a group of young people started to develop a prototype mobile phone application allowing crowdsourcing of data on power cuts.

These ideas are in their early stages in Tanzania, and they need further resourcing and feeding in to a dialogue process for change. However, they offer some promising and innovative approaches to building trust and transparency in the electricity sector. Ultimately, 'better power' involves much more than simply having 'more' power. Energy is about people, and enabling consumers to become active in transforming their energy supplies is crucial for effective change. The idea of 'better power' is beginning to take shape.



Knowledge Products

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges. We support some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in decision making.